

New Jersey

Sections

Op-ed: Don't pollute, dilute N.J. drinking water panel



(<http://connect.nj.com/user/njotoped/index.html>) By Times Op-Ed (<http://connect.nj.com/user/njotoped/posts.html>)
on February 03, 2013 at 3:00 AM, updated February 03, 2013 at 3:01 AM

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By Tracy Carluccio

Special to the Times

A bill sponsored by Assemblyman John Burzichelli would add three representatives of the industrial/commercial sector to the top panel that recommends safe drinking water standards to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

I have additional information and a different perspective on **A-2123**, (http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/A2500/2123_R2.HTM) which changes the makeup of the state's Drinking Water Quality Institute (DWQI).

The institute is not a regulatory board, so the bill would not accomplish what Burzichelli, D-3, of Paulsboro, states as its goal in a **Jan. 23 Times article** (http://www.nj.com/gloucester-county/index.ssf/2013/01/bill_looks_to_add_industry_pro.html) — to give industry access to “regulatory discussions” to assist companies that may get fined for violations in knowing the regulations.

The Drinking Water Quality Institute is charged by law to recommend the standards that water providers must meet to protect public health. Pollutants that are found in raw water must be treated to safe levels that are developed by scientists at the DWQI, based on a body of evidence that includes risk assessments, health studies, sampling of New Jersey water, and the evaluation of available technology to remove or reduce a pollutant's presence. A recommendation then goes to DEP, the regulatory process commences and a decision is made through “regulatory discussions” in the public rule-making arena where all stakeholders, including industry, can participate.

Once a standard is adopted by the state, water purveyors — not the chemical dischargers — are on the hook

to meet that standard.

The DWQI is not the place for more industry or commercial influence. This is basically a technical and scientific effort with a reasonable balance of interests already represented on the institute's board to ask the tough questions – water purveyors, academic scientists, the public (one of whom currently represents a pharmaceutical company) and six ex-officio members from various agencies.

What could the public possibly gain from giving chemical-generating industries extra influence over the science of setting safe drinking water levels of these substances? How could this not be a conflict of interest?

For 30 years the nationally recognized DWQI has successfully done the methodical work of protecting us from dangerous contaminants through a cautious and considered process. Highly toxic substances such as PCBs, arsenic and various hazardous organic compounds have been studied, and maximum contaminant levels have been set for our drinking water.

In the Jan. 23 article, a DEP spokesman stated that the last DWQI recommendation was made in 2009. What wasn't stated was that those recommendations for contaminants such as volatile organic compounds have been ignored by DEP and, in a new low, the DWQI was basically shut down in September 2010 by the current state administration. This stopped all progress on some of the most hazardous substances in our drinking water – perfluorinated chemicals, hexavalent chromium and perchlorate. Since these are not regulated at the federal level either, we are drinking water polluted with these substances, all known to have harmful health effects.

The Chemistry Council of New Jersey appears to be behind the current standstill. Now I suspect they are manipulating legislation.

Finally, Burzichelli says the goal is more transparency. The Drinking Water Quality Institute's work is distinguished already by openness. It is very accessible to public view and input through all stages of research and information gathering. Giving industry more seats at the table does nothing to open the process wider for the public.

Also, A-2123's proposed changes to operating procedures amount to nothing more than red tape that will slow down the research process and prolong the amount of time the public is exposed to a chemical in their tap water.

Ironically, this bill highlights an agency that is in trouble, but the proposed legislation does not address the problem. The problem is a de facto coup d'état has shut down the DWQI, holding hostage the New Jersey Safe Drinking Water Act that mandates that our drinking water be cleaned of dangerous, emerging pollutants.

A-2123 should be scrapped and the DWQI must be allowed to get back to its statutorily assigned work of protecting public health.

Tracy Carluccio is deputy director of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, based in Bristol, Pa.

Its website is delawareriverkeeper.org. (<http://delawareriverkeeper.org/>)

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